

## Council nixes gravel deal

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By a 3-2 vote, the Willits City Council stopped the city staff from further exploration of a deal with the railroad to mine gravel from the city's watershed.

The Northwestern Pacific Railroad Company contacted the city in June suggesting a partnership where the railroad would mine 1-2 million tons of gravel annually and transport it via rail; and in return would pay the city a royalty for the gravel and restore rail service to Willits.

The issue before the council was solely whether the city staff should begin negotiations with the railroad to explore a possible option with the NWP and to allow NWP personnel access to the quarry site for an assessment.

While council members supported the return of the railroad to the city, much of the discussion revolved around whether this was the way to bring rail back to the city.

Mayor Tami Jorgensen and Vice Mayor Holly Madrigal voted to continue discussions with the railroad and Councilmembers Karen Oslund, Larry Stranske and Greg Kanne voted against.

Stranske was firm in his desire that if the city wanted to pursue a quarry, then they should hire the geologists and hydrologists to determine the quality and quantity of the gravel and assess impact on the watershed rather than rely upon others.

Oslund said while she supported the return of the railroad, she was not sure it was the responsibility of the city water ratepayers to shoulder the costs. Oslund said she might reconsider later in the year when the full costs of supplying adequate water to the city were determined.

Councilman Greg Kanne supported the return of rail but was not sure the railroad would provide the city with the best gravel price.

Jorgensen and Madrigal believed allowing the staff to continue looking at the option would provide more information about the potential quarry at minimal cost and exposure to the city.

The issue cannot be pursued further without a future vote of the council allowing it.

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